



# UTAH FOUNDATION

RESEARCH • ANALYZE • INFORM

150 South State Street, Suite 444  
Salt Lake City, Utah 84111

801.355.1400  
utahfoundation.org

## Report Finds Major Gap in Meeting Legal Needs in Utah *Lower-Income Utahns Often Do Without Representation*

(April 30, 2020) – Today, Utah Foundation releases *The Justice Gap: Addressing the Unmet Legal Needs of Lower-Income Utahns*. This report focuses on the legal needs of lower-income Utahns – or the roughly 26% of Utah’s population living at or below 200% of the federal poverty line. The purpose is to inform the public of Utahns’ civil legal needs and provide research to help stakeholders with informed decision-making on the future allocation of legal resources.

Among the findings of the new report:

- Most people do not have representation in civil legal cases in Utah; for the 62,000 debt collection cases, nearly 100% of petitioners (plaintiffs) have lawyers, compared with only 2% of respondents (defendants); for the 14,000 eviction cases, 90% of petitioners have lawyers, compared with only 5% of respondents.
- More than two-thirds of Utah’s lower-income survey respondents indicated that they could not afford a lawyer if they needed one.
- While the median hourly fee for a Utah lawyer is between \$150 and \$250, fewer than one-in-five Utah lawyers offer “discounted fees and rates for persons of modest means” or a “sliding scale based on income.”
- Rural counties tend to have relatively low availability of local legal representation.
- Most lower-income Utahns try to solve their legal problems on their own.
- When asked if the respondents tried to get help with the problems indicated in the survey, three-in-five said they did.
- Half of the respondents that sought help were successful; about one-in-five found assistance from a social or human service agency, one-in-five found help online, and another one-in-five hired a paid attorney. Only about one third used free legal help.
- Over half of all services provided for lower-income Utahns’ legal needs are for family law and immigration issues.
- Financial legal needs topped the list of legal-need types with 26% of households, followed by employment (21%), health law (19%) and public benefits (16%).
- Domestic violence was the least reported legal issue of the 19 types of legal needs in the survey at just 4% of households; however, it had the highest rating for severity for victims and their households.

- The most common employment law issues were that employees were forced to work overtime or “the bad shifts” and that employers “did not pay wages, overtime or benefits, or did not pay them on time.”

Utah Foundation President Peter Reichard says the report provides information to help the legal community better calibrate pro bono and “low-bono” work to needs. “Often, lower-income Utahns address their civil legal challenges without representation while the other side has ‘lawyered up,’” Reichard says. “Addressing this problem can help to level the playing field in the justice arena.”

Special thanks to the **Utah Bar Foundation**, which commissioned *The Justice Gap*. The report, along with an executive summary, is available on the Utah Foundation website at [www.utahfoundation.org](http://www.utahfoundation.org).

\* \* \*

*Founded in 1945, Utah Foundation’s mission is to produce objective, thorough and well-reasoned research and analysis that promotes the effective use of public resources, a thriving economy, a well-prepared workforce and a high quality of life for Utahns. Utah Foundation seeks to help decision-makers and citizens understand and address complex issues. Utah Foundation also offers constructive guidance to improve governmental policies, programs and structures.*

*Utah Foundation is an independent, nonpartisan, nonprofit research organization.*

#### **Contacts:**

Shawn Teigen (Principal Author)  
Vice President and Director of  
Research, Utah Foundation  
(801)355-1400, ext. 3  
[shawn@utahfoundation.org](mailto:shawn@utahfoundation.org)

Peter Reichard  
President, Utah Foundation  
(801)355-1400, ext. 1  
[peter@utahfoundation.org](mailto:peter@utahfoundation.org)